



The second Coastal Zone Management Conference reports excellent results

During Monday and Tuesday, June 5 and 6, the Aruba Resort, Spa & Casino hosted a series of lectures and workshops that was the second Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Stakeholders' Conference. The CZM is a cooperative effort of government agencies, water sports operators, local and international environmental conservation agencies and experts and individuals concerned with the protection and preservation of Aruba's marine environment and shores. The purpose of the conference was for these different agencies to develop a network that can assist in devising and implementing a viable plan that will further the purpose of the CZM. Towards this end, conference organizer Byron Boekhoudt of the Ministry of Culture expressed that the two days were very well spent, resulting in definitive action that will likely be put in to practice by the end of this year. A great deal of the plans and proposed legislation is based on the model of Aruba's sister island of Bonaire, which sets a standard in the Caribbean for environmental protection. Kalli de Mayer, Executive Director of the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance, and a former director of the Bonaire Marine Park was a speaker at the conference, and helpful in devising a plan for Aruba.

Mr. Boekhoudt reports he was very satisfied with the group session in particular, as experienced individuals, such as the water sports operators brought forward excellent ideas for protecting the marine environment. According to Mr. Boekhoudt, these sessions resulted in three initiatives that can be put in to practice almost immediately, without having to wait for legislation to be passed, and that should reap immediate benefits. One of these, the issuance of badges that must first be obtained before diving, has been in practice in Bonaire for some time, and was proposed for Aruba years ago. The cost of a badge in Bonaire is \$10, and divers are not allowed in the water until they have obtained one, which is good for one year. The proceeds of the badges go towards the maintenance of permanent, environmentally protective moorings, so that boats do not damage the reefs with their anchors.

Another initiative proposed by local teachers was regarding devising materials and an outreach program for education of the public bringing to their attention such issues as protection of the turtles and the mangroves, amongst others. To this end, the third initiative, proposed by representatives of the Aruba Tourism Authority and the Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association, the establishment of a website by the end of year, would also prove beneficial and economical.

"What is most gratifying," stated Mr. Boekhoudt, "is that the various agencies involved, that have had their differences in the past have put them aside for these two days and focused on what they have in common. This has resulted in four reports regarding research, policy development, communication structure, and product development."

Most importantly, present at the conference was a delegation from Aruban law enforcement agencies that are committed to enforcing legislation, and seeing that violators are prosecuted, something that is essential to the success of any plan to protect the island's marine environment.

All the attendees of the conference, including the CZM team that is devising the plans and legislation to implement an effective system of protection, were very encouraged and enthusiastic about what transpired over the two days. During a closing reception courtesy of the Radisson Resort and Casino, the first merchandise that will help finance their efforts was introduced, a beautiful tee shirt donated by Astrid Berlinski of Anly Printing, N.V. This was the first of various products that will be offered for sale by CZM member agencies that will "spread the word" about protecting Aruba's environment, something that concerns both island residents and visitors alike.